

# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
906 W. Sinclair Road  
Calipatria, California 92233-9744  
Com: 760/348-5278 Fax: 760/348-7245

### Memorandum

Date: December 10, 2002

To: Steve Thompson, CNO Manager, Sacramento, CA

Through: Pam Ensley, Regional Fire Management Coordinator, Portland, OR

From: Sylvia R. Pelizza, Project Leader, Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR Complex

Subject: Request for Fire Management Plan Exemption for the Coachella Valley NWR

Please accept this exemption for the Coachella Valley NWR. As stated in the attachment, there is no burnable vegetation or plans to do prescribed burning on this station.

The refuge was established to protect the threatened Coachella Valley fringed-toed lizard and its fragile habitat which consists of alluvial sand dunes. Thus, there is no habitat which requires prescribed burning.

If additional information or clarification is needed, please contact me at 760-348-5278, Monday through Friday, 7:00am to 3:30pm.

Sylvia R. Pelizza



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Project Leader

Project Leader

## **Coachella Valley National Wildlife Refuge Fire Management Plan Exemption**

When approved, this document will exempt Coachella Valley National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) from developing a Fire Management Plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policy requires that all refuges with burnable vegetation develop a Fire Management Plan (620 DM 1). The Project Leader believes that this Refuge contains essentially no burnable vegetation due to weather and fuels conditions that will prevent ignition and fire spread. Additionally, the Refuge has no established fire management program. Therefore, a Fire Management Plan for this Refuge is not required.

### **Justification:**

We believe that Coachella Valley NWR is exempt from the requirement to prepare a Fire Management Plan for the following reasons:

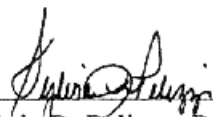
- § Lack of burnable vegetation
- § Lack of ignition sources
- § No established fire management program
- § No reason or plans to conduct prescribed burning.

Coachella Valley NWR is located in southern California approximately 15 miles east of Palm Springs. It consists of sparse vegetation with large expanses of rolling sand dunes. The Refuge totals 3709 acres, but only approximately 50% has any vegetation, amounting to approximately 1600 acres of patchy fuels. The lack of rainfall, extreme summer temperatures normally over 110 degrees Fahrenheit, continuous blowing sand, desert hardpan soils, extreme rockiness, and steep cliffs have resulted in sparse vegetative growth. Therefore, fuels are sparse and non-continuous, limiting the potential for fire spread.

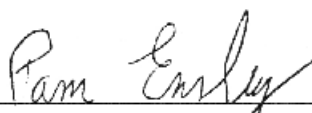
The vegetation community is dominated by a native creosote shrub, an annual low-growing exotic mustard (*Brassica tournfordii*) that is lush when actively growing but has very little mass when dry, and various other annual forbs. Vegetation growth occurs primarily during the spring, but is minimal due to the lack of rainfall (annual average is 2.75 inches). In May through July, the annual plants dry up in the hot and dry desert climate. Fuels are most flammable at this time, but blowing sand tends to cover these low growing plants in a matter of weeks. Winds during this time period are recorded most every day at less than 15 miles per hour. However, occasional wind storms with winds greater than 25 miles per hour occur and blow away a good portion of the desiccated plant materials not covered by sand. In September through early November, temperatures are cooler and occasional cloud bursts with very little lightning activity and usually less than .25 inches of precipitation occur. By this time most of the fuels have blown away or

been covered with sand.

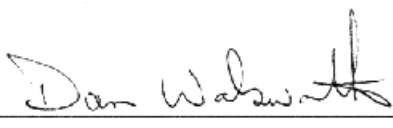
The Refuge is closed to the public and there is virtually no trespass, so there is little chance of a human-ignited fire. A California Department of Forestry Fire Station is located on the eastern corner of the Refuge, and fire hydrants are strategically located along the eastern and northern boundaries. Lightning is rare on the sand dunes, but should a strike occur, the lack of vegetation in these areas would prevent ignition. Since the native vegetation is not fire adapted, we have no reason nor plans to conduct any prescribed fire on the Refuge. The only known wildfire within the Refuge boundary occurred during the summer in 1995. The fire was ignited by a neighbor burning trash in their back yard. The fire burned an area approximately one hundred yards long along the Refuge fence row. The local fire department was called, but the fire self-extinguished and was out when they arrived.

Prepared:   
Sylvia R. Pelizza, Project Leader  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex

12/10/02  
Date

Concurred:   
Pam Ensley, Regional Fire Management Coordinator  
Pacific Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

1/7/03  
Date

Approved:  Acting CNO Mgr  
for Steve Thompson, Manager  
California and Nevada Operations  
Pacific Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

1/15/03  
Date

Prepared:

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Sylvia R. Pelizza, Project Leader  
Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex

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Date

Concurred:

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Pam Ensley, Regional Fire Management Coordinator  
Pacific Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Date

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Steve Thompson, Manager  
California and Nevada Operations  
Pacific Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Date